Makiritare SS 20

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/190 cont./ scorn them, and, at first sight, they seemed to be unworried, but the knowledge that they no longer live alone in the land of their fathers, and the fact of having heard that four days prior to our arrival /191/ at the conuco an Indian who had sought refuge by climbing a tree was shot by a Sanemá arrow and fell lifeless into the river, constantly tortured them.

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A powerful stimulus which always encouraged the Makiritare on their numerous trips was to get a wife among their neighbors of the same tribe. Nowadays, despite the intense scorn which the Makiritare profess toward the Yanoama, taking a wife from that tribe is not considered an impossible or degrading thing; there are many Yanoama women who have married Makiritare men (cf. Grelier, 1955b, p. 10). This matrimonial interchange inevitably carries with it an assimilation of cultures between the two tribes, a process in which the Makiritare cultural pattern will dominate that of the Yanoama and the Yanoama genes will infiltrate the Makiritare gene pool. There is not the least doubt but that the Sanemá, who were brought in for a short time, arrived at the upper Ventuari and Caura where they took up residence to stay, and that the present fusion between the Caribe and the Yanoama ought not to be explained so much by the good will of the former as by the vitality of the latter.

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The Waica subtribe occupies the central part of the present Yanoama territory, that of the upper Orinoco and its tributaries above the mouth of the Ocamo, including also the southern bank of the river (Barker, 1953, p. 434). As we have already mentioned, they appear to live also in the general arc of the upper Rio Branco and its western tributaries, and Schuster (1958, p. 114) is very probably right when he says that the Sierra Parima does not bound the Waica zone, but that it extends to Brazilian territory.

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We have already mentioned the first contacts which the Whites had with the Waica, and, after a somewhat unfruitful effort by Hamilton Rice at the beginning of the present century, the Waica world went without contact with science until the New Tribes Mission was able to start peaceful relations with the Waica through the missionary James Paul Barker. Some ethnographic data were also published on this Yanoama subtribe by several

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one gave a thought to these peaks that towered higher with every bend of the river. Then one afternoon, after a storm, they dropped out of sight, and we realized that we had entered a different region. Manuera pointed leftwards, to the mouth of a small river whose water was yellow.

'Pulipuli. Nuna,' he told us—Nuna being the Shirian and Makiritari pronunciation of 'Luna'. 'There is my home, the home of the Shiriana.'

We swung into the mouth of the Luna and tied up under a tall clay bank among a few ill-made canoes—if you could call them canoes, for they looked more like rotten tree-trunks swept on to the little landing-beach in the course of some sudden flood.

Our arrival in the dirty waters of the Luna was a signal for swift and secret flight on the part of the population. Some Shirian youngsters had been hunting a capybara which the throb of our motor scared off. The boys, no less scared than the animal, ran to hide in the nearby huts, spreading the wondrous news that men had come with beards and an engine.

The Moon Valley people occupy a fair-sized wedge of territory in the forests between the Lower Canaracuni and the Caura. Their little huts are sorry imitations of the big Makiritari erections, and they have burned out big patches of forest for the sowing of manioc and bananas. All this is the work of the last twenty years. Not till then did the tribes of the Shirian borderland grow weary of their nomad life, their wars and their plundering expeditions, and decide to set up house and home. Pulipuli became a sort of agricultural centre for the groups living on the Upper Caura, or on the Merehuari and its tributary streams as far as the great mountain saddle between Uana-Coco, Canaua, and Uagna. These people here were therefore the most advanced of the Shirians, not only in a geographical sense but also in their culture. Their numbers were continually increasing because they had a magnetic attraction for neighbouring tribes who were still mere primitive forest hunters.

Manuera had married a Pulipuli girl and then joined her tribe. 'Let us build a fine house,' he had told her, 'and I'll come and live with you. I'll bring good manioc and banana roots. We'll plant a big patch, in the proper way we Makiritaris know, and there'll be no lack of food. You Shirians are for ever as hungry as beasts and I can't stomach the worms you eat.'

There was great puzzlement among the old Shirians—those whose hairless heads showed the marks of so many battles and so many robbing and plundering expeditions all through the valley and the Merehuari cordillera as far as the

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

Branco river in Brazil. They considered an agricultural life a peasant's life, and a dull one at that, with no possible appeal to the imagination. There were a few palavers about it, but it is well-known that among primitive peoples the old are listened to least: wisdom favours the youths and the boys, who have their whole lives in front of them—not behind them like a stream flowing away. The young men prevailed, and burned the forest. The first big hut was built according to Manuera's ideas, and served as a pattern for all the Shirians when they came to build.

So we too arrived at this 'big hut', which Manuera showed us with a pride that was scarcely justified, and here too the Shirians fled away into the woods, much to the amusement of our guides. We could hear them there, uttering their guttural cries of terror and wonderment.

Inside the hut there was no one, with the exception of two old folk stretched out in their liana hammocks. They didn't stir: it was as if they didn't even see us. One of them was a woman whose body was reddened nearly all over with *citrate*—a skin disease frequent among the Indians. A macaw, scared by the sight of our beards, set up a howl on his perch and started biting through the cord which attached him to it. Manuera went off into the woods, calling the others, and the thick green swallowed him up for a good hour. We were rather afraid he would want to stop here for the night, for our stomachs were turning at the filth around us, but we had misjudged our man: Manuera was now engaged in more important business and had no desire for more than a brief, benevolent survey of his kinsfolk. We very soon got back to the boat and at last were able to take deep breaths of the fresh river and forest air.

Manuera told us that the Shirians had not been really so scared by our arrival. Indeed, they had been expecting us. But they couldn't quite pluck up the courage to look close. Our stature, our beards, our clothes and our guns, in the eyes of primitive people, turned us into supermen—dread figures, terrifying as monsters and above all, essentially evil.

The news that we were on the way had been bruited abroad by the party we had met at the Moné pass—and *à propos* of this, we learned from Manuera that the spider-child had died soon afterwards, somewhere on the Sabaru. It was a relief to hear this, even if the poor little monstrosity's death had been caused by the sight of us, as the Shirians thought. Manuera's gestures became wild, and his speech difficult to follow, as he tried to explain their attitude.